

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 245

July 29, 1998, 7:16 p.m.
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TREASURY APPROPRIATIONS/Guidelines for Post Office Closings

SUBJECT: Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1999 . . . S. 2312.
Cochran motion to table the Baucus amendment No. 3378.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE FAILED, 21-76

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 2312, the Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1999, will provide \$29.924 billion in new budget authority (BA) for the Department of the Treasury, Postal Service, Executive Office of the President, and various independent agencies. This amount is \$4.598 billion more than provided in fiscal year (FY) 1998, and is \$3.095 billion more than requested. The large increase in funding is due to the addition of \$3.270 billion in contingent emergency funding to address the year 2000 (Y2K) computer date change conversion problem.

The Baucus amendment would require the Postal Service to follow certain procedures anytime it relocated, closed, or consolidated post offices. First, it would have to give at least 60 days' notice to the community being served. Each person served would have to be notified in writing of the change, the date of the change, and the justification for the change. Second, any person served by the post office would be allowed to offer an alternative proposal within the 60-day notice period. Third, before making a final decision, the Postal Service would have to hold a hearing at which any person served by the post office would be allowed to submit oral or written testimony. The Postal Service would consider numerous specified criteria in deciding whether to move, relocate, or consolidate a post office, including: the extent to which the post office was part of a core downtown business area; any potential effect the change might have on the community served; whether the community served opposed the change; any potential effect on employees of the post office; whether the change was consistent with the Government's policy of providing a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns in which post offices are not self-sustaining; and the economic benefits of the change. When it made its final determination, the Postal Service would issue a written report on its findings both for the alternative it decided upon and for any alternative proposals that had been submitted to it. Copies of the report would be available at the post office that was the subject of the report. No action would be taken for 60 days, during

(See other side)

YEAS (21)		NAYS (76)				NOT VOTING (3)	
Republicans (18 or 35%)	Democrats (3 or 7%)	Republicans (34 or 65%)		Democrats (42 or 93%)		Republicans (3)	Democrats (0)
Ashcroft	Cleland	Abraham	Hatch	Akaka	Johnson	Coats ⁻²	
Campbell	Graham	Allard	Hutchinson	Baucus	Kennedy	Gorton ⁻²	
Cochran	Moynihan	Bennett	Hutchison	Biden	Kerrey	Helms ⁻³	
Craig		Bond	Inhofe	Bingaman	Kerry		
Faircloth		Brownback	Jeffords	Boxer	Kohl		
Gramm		Burns	Kempthorne	Breaux	Landrieu		
Gregg		Chafee	Kyl	Bryan	Lautenberg		
Lott		Collins	McCain	Bumpers	Leahy		
Lugar		Coverdell	McConnell	Byrd	Levin		
Mack		D'Amato	Sessions	Conrad	Lieberman		
Murkowski		DeWine	Shelby	Daschle	Mikulski		
Nickles		Domenici	Smith, Bob	Dodd	Moseley-Braun		
Roberts		Enzi	Smith, Gordon	Dorgan	Murray		
Roth		Frist	Snowe	Durbin	Reed		
Santorum		Grams	Specter	Feingold	Reid		
Stevens		Grassley	Thomas	Feinstein	Robb		
Thompson		Hagel	Warner	Ford	Rockefeller		
Thurmond				Glenn	Sarbanes		
				Harkin	Torricelli		
				Hollings	Wellstone		
				Inouye	Wyden		

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

which time appeals could be filed. Any appeals would be ruled on by the Postal Commission within 120 days of their being made. Finally, any change made would have to be in conformance with local zoning requirements.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. After debate, Senator Cochran moved to table the Baucus amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment. After the vote, the amendment was accepted by voice vote.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

We reluctantly oppose this amendment because we agree that in some cases, and especially in small town and rural areas, the Postal Service has closed or moved post offices without giving any thought to the desires of the local communities. However, we have been pursuing this issue with the Postal Service and it has been very responsive. The Postmaster General has imposed a moratorium on the closing of small post offices, and has recently published in the Federal Register new requirements that it is imposing on itself for consultation with local leaders and customers on all facility projects. The projects must be publicized in the local newspaper and a public hearing held to explain the proposal. Additionally, local public officials will receive at least a 45-day notice before the Postal Service solicits for a new site. The new processes should provide ample opportunity for public input in a responsible and orderly way. We should give them a chance to work before we impose the lengthier, more detailed notice and consultation processes of the Baucus amendment. We want local consultation, but we do not want requirements that are so complex that they will stop the Postal Service from modernizing its 35,000 facilities. During the last year, it has modernized 8,000 of those facilities; it should be allowed to continue. In our opinion, the cooperative process is working--we do not need to impose new statutory requirements. We wholeheartedly agree with the intent of the Baucus amendment; we just disagree with the method. Therefore, we must oppose this amendment.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

In small towns across America, people walk to the post office to get their mail. Those post offices are typically in the heart of town, and serve as an informal place for neighbors to meet. The threads of community are woven and reinforced as people gather throughout the day at these offices. In recent years, though, the Postal Service has been shutting down, moving, or consolidating post offices without warning and without bothering to find out the wishes of the people they are there to serve. Frequently they are moved to the outskirts of a town and put next to major highways for the convenience of the Postal Service. This practice should be prohibited legislatively. The Baucus amendment would set up a process to get local communities involved in these decisions. The Postal Service would still have the final say, but at least it would be forced to consider the effects its changes had on the people it served. We urge our colleagues to accept this amendment.